THOMAS JEFFERSON

PHILADELPHIA:
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1890.

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THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Jefferson, THOMAS, third president of the United States, was born at Shadwell, Albemarle county, Virginia, 13th April 1743. His father, Peter Jefferson (d. 1757), of Welsh descent, was a planter and surveyor of note in the colony, and a member of the House of Burgesses; his mother was a granddaughter of William Randolph (1650–1711). Thomas Jefferson was the third child and eldest son of a family of ten children. He entered William and Mary College at the age of seventeen, three years after the death of his father, and remained there two years. In 1767 he was admitted to the bar, and practised with success. In 1769 he was a delegate to the House of Burgesses, and here his first important effort was in support of a motion for the easier emancipation of slaves. The passing of the Boston Port Bill, to take effect on 1st June 1774, decided Virginia to make common cause with Massachusetts, and Jefferson favoured the resolution passed in the Assembly of Virginia to set apart the first day of June as a day of fasting and prayer. The governor, Lord Dunmore, offended by this action, dissolved

the Assembly, and the members met in the Raleigh Tavern, Williamsburgh, and resolved to advise the people of Virginia to send deputies to a convention to consider the affairs of the colony and elect delegates to a general colonial congress. Jefferson was chosen a member of the convention, and, unable to attend, he sent a communication which was published under the title of 'A Summary View of the Rights of British North America.' It was not adopted as written by Jefferson, still he was threatened by Lord Dunmore with prosecution for high-treason; and his name was included in a bill of attainder moved in parliament, but not pressed to a vote. Jefferson was a member of the second congress, which met at Philadelphia in 1775, and took his seat on 25th June, a few days after the battle of Bunker Hill. Here his unswerving devotion to his country's cause, his close acquaintance with English law, and his manner, characterised by John Adams as 'prompt, frank, explicit, and decisive,' secured him the respect of the House. He was re-elected to the third congress (1776); and on 7th June Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, as instructed by his constituents, moved that independence should be declared. Congress fixed 1st July for the consideration of Mr. Lee's motion, and meanwhile appointed a committee of five to prepare a suitable declaration on which to act; Jefferson was chairman, and the others were Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. By request of his colleagues, Jefferson wrote the draft of the declaration which was submitted to the House on 28th June.

Lee's resolution was passed July 2, and the formal declaration, essentially as submitted, was adopted July 4, 1776.

Jefferson now resigned his seat, and, although appointed a commissioner to France with Franklin and Silas Deane, he declined the office in order to serve the people of Virginia in forming a state constitution. Among the reforms largely due to him were laws converting estates tail into fee-simple, abolishing the principle of primogeniture, and establishing the freedom of religious opinion. He succeeded Patrick Henry as governor of Virginia in 1779–81; and during the invasion of the state by Arnold and Cornwallis he was equal to the emergency. In 1783 he was elected to congress, then sitting at Annapolis, Maryland, where he secured the adoption of the decimal system of coinage. He was sent in the summer of 1784 to act with Franklin and Adams as plenipotentiary in negotiating treaties of commerce with foreign nations; but in this mission they were not very successful, the only treaties effected being with Prussia and Morocco. The next year Jefferson succeeded Franklin as minister to France, just before the opening events of the Revolution. He remained during the stormy meetings of the National Assembly and the destruction of the Bastille, performing with much tact the delicate duties of ambassador, but evidently in sympathy with the revolutionary movement. In 1789 Washington appointed him secretary of state, but he did not enter on the duties of the office till March 1790. From the origin of the two political parties, Federal and Republican, Jef-

ferson was the recognised head of the latter, while the other members of the cabinet and the president were Federalists. On 1st January 1794 Jefferson withdrew from public life to his estate at Monticello to devote his leisure to agricultural pursuits and his favourite literary and scientific studies.

From this retirement he was called to the vice-presidency of the United States in 1797; and in 1801 he was chosen president by the House of Representatives on the thirty-sixth ballot. The popular vote re-elected him by a large majority for the next presidential term. During the eight years of his administration party spirit ran high. Among the chief events of his first term were the war with Tripoli, the admission of Ohio, and the Louisiana purchase; of his second term, the firing on the *Chesapeake* by the *Leopard*, the Embargo, the trial of Aaron Burr for treason, and the prohibition of the slave-trade. For these and nearly all other acts and events of his administrations Jefferson was as warmly praised by some as blamed by others. In 1809, after nearly forty years of public service, he bade adieu to political life and strife. Henceforth his time was devoted to the cultivation of his estate, to boundless hospitality, to the interests of education, and especially to the establishment and superintendence of the University of Virginia. He died at Monticello, July 4, 1826, a few hours before the death of John Adams. Among his papers was found this inscription for his tomb: 'Here lies buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and

Father of the University of Virginia.' In person he was over six feet in height, with blue eyes, fair complexion, broad forehead, and, in early life, red hair. He was a good classical scholar, and proficient in the science of his day, a ready writer and fluent talker, but not an eloquent orator.

We have his *Writings, Correspondence, &c.* (9 vols. ed. by H. A. Washington, New York, 1853–54), his *Notes on Virginia* (Paris, 1781), and his *Manual of Parliamentary Practice.* See Lives by Tucker (1837), Parton (1874), and Morse ('American Statesmen' series, 1883); also Adams, *The First Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (2 vols. New York, 1889).

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